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Sec. 4.01.2 A Small  
Town in Germany

## The Ferret

A SMALL TOWN IN GERMANY. By  
John le Carré. 383 pages. Cow-  
ard-McCann. \$6.95.

As spy thrillers go, this is well above has lost his soul, if he ever had one, in the obtuse norm of Helen MacInnes and the service of professional ideals he the Nick Carter series. Within his limita- would probably be embarrassed to articu- tions as a writer and an intellect, which late. Both women revile him for his cold- are not overwhelming but still palpable, ness, but they spill the beans anyway. John le Carré has always belonged on which is all he and the self-indulgent es- the serious fan's shelf because of his skill pionage reading public care about in the at rendering specific atmospheres of first place. High marks to le Carré for place and system. Whether or not he is this grim, brilliantly overdrawn confec- accurate about spying as it is actually tion. Mission accomplished.

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spied, he sounds professional, which is to say dedicated and knowing, yet disil- lusioned. He can keep a secret and make you believe it matters, though he places a higher value on people than the laby- rinths of security they create. His heroes and villains are never superhuman, just grim ordinaries with out-of-the-ordinary twists that get them into trouble and out of it. The result is updated Graham Greene without the Catholicism or the major talent.

And yet "A Small Town in Germany," like "The Spy Who Came In From the Cold" and "The Looking-Glass War," is excellent bedtime reading. The small town is Bonn, home of the British Em- bassy and the political capital of the Bundesrepublik. Le Carré worked there as a second secretary in the political sec- tion and knows the territory. A careful reader could probably burgle the ambas- sador's desk using the information in this book, which extends from the system for keeping track of keys to the location of a crucial back stairway. This may also be the first time in English that the stolid, fog-ridden, jerry-built spirit of Bonn has been "done."

**Crucial:** Alan Turner arrives from Lon- don to investigate a breach in security. A temporary employee, Leo Harting, has apparently absconded with the crucial Green File and a mass of other secret papers. Turner's job: find them. The permanent staff, an encyclopedia of the English class system, dislikes Turner, the angriest of young men, and tries to keep him at arm's length. Turner stops at nothing and even beats a well-bred Eng- lishwoman. The Germans kick him about rather smartly too, momentarily evening the score.

In the end, of course, the professional ferret burrows into all of their lives, snarl- ing incessantly at inefficient gentility and shoddy sentiment. He finds out most of what he needs to know from two women who had slept with Harting and helped his one-man mission against the neo-Nazi leader Karfeld, who is hard at work at the same time sabotaging British at- tempts to enter the Common Market. Turner is a caricature of the embittered lower-class Englishman with diploma. He